

Did you know that every 60 seconds, a working adult touches as many as 30 objects which may be contaminated by bacteria or viruses causing infectious disease?

BACTERIA AND VIRUSES AT WORK



According to one recent workplace microbial survey, "desktop surfaces, computer keyboards, mouse and telephone receivers are more contaminated than restroom toilet seats."

Environmental microbiologist Dr. Charles Gerba from the University of Arizona, recently shared his tips on keeping your office clean and hygienic. We learn that the desktop is one of the germiest places in the office and that 20-30% of women's handbags have fecal bacteria underneath.

Dr. Gerba discovered that the average office toilet seat had 49 germs per 6.45 square cm. Desktops had almost 21,000 germs per 6.45 square cm, and phones had more than 25,000 germs per 6.45 square cm. Desks, phones, computer keyboards and your mouse are key germ transfer points because people touch them so often, Gerba said, adding that coughing and sneezing can leave behind "a minefield of viruses" that can live on a surface for up to three days.

Enclosed environments, where people are working or interacting in close proximity with one another, are particularly at higher risk of the spread of germs. With people often working or moving around public areas while ill, this can quickly lead to localized outbreaks among a larger number of people.

WebMD recently reported the 6 dirtiest places in your office. The study researchers swabbed some 4,800 surfaces in office buildings housing some 3,000 employees.

Office types included manufacturing facilities, law firms, insurance companies, health care companies, and call centers.

1. break room sink-faucet handles
2. microwave door handles
3. keyboards
4. refrigerator door handles
5. water fountain buttons
6. vending machine buttons

Since our hands are responsible for the spread of 80% of common infectious diseases, effective hand hygiene continues to be universally recognized as the smartest, most cost effective means of infection control in the workplace.

"Health promotion or wellness programs have been shown to be effective at reducing absenteeism, health costs, workers compensation claims and turnover but often, forget to address infectious diseases. Workplace infection control programs focusing on hand hygiene have been found effective at reducing absenteeism on average by around 40%. An important component of prevention is hand hygiene training and supplies including soap, sanitizer, paper towels and tissues," comments Barry Michaels, an infectious disease expert.

Clean out your keyboard - Most office cleaning companies do not touch computers or keyboards because they don't want to risk causing any damage. Hygiene is left to the employee, and many don't bother. Gerba suggests using an

alcohol-based sanitizer for cleaning the keyboard. Simply blowing compressed air over it is not going to remove bacteria clinging to the surface. The best practice is to disinfect AND use compressed air.

Protect your face - Office workers touch their hands to their faces an average of 18 times an hour. When we touch our faces, we bring all the collected gunk from our keyboard, desktop or phone right to our respiratory and digestive systems every three and a half minutes - bacteria and viruses couldn't ask for a better transportation system.

Dispose of unwanted food - People often eat at their desks or store food in the drawer. Crumbs can accumulate and provide a giant breeding ground for bacteria. Unclean work areas can pose hazards to a worker's health and a liability to the business.

Don't let germs crawl - Bacteria and germs can multiply and make their way from one cubicle or workspace to another. Gerba recommends taking note of your neighbor's hygiene practices, and to take precautions so that the sharing of bacteria doesn't occur.